

From the Editor

WHERE'S YOUR WEAPON, SOLDIER?

This issue's account of the bloody engagement of Company C, 9th U.S. Infantry Regiment against a numerically superior force of insurgents points out a lesson that's as true today as it was a century ago: Don't let your guard down! Fighting men have had to relearn this bitter lesson in most wars before and since, and—amazingly—many of them have lived to tell the story. Many have not. Those friendly folks who live outside the wire, who haul your trash, clean your compound, and wave as you pass them in your HMMWV can turn on you in a minute, and you may never see it coming.

Once a few of the Manchu's at Balangiga got hold of their .30 caliber Krag-Jorgensens, the tide turned and 26 Americans escaped what would have been certain death. It was not a relief force that saved the day, nor was it machineguns or danger-close artillery fires. It was the fighting spirit and the individual weapons of those embattled young Americans. Had other members of the company not been separated from their rifles, still more would probably have survived. Every soldier needs to be able to get to his weapon in a hurry, shoot fast, and put a bullet where he wants it. In today's high-tech world, there is a temptation to regard our personal rifle or sidearm as a when-all-else-fails option instead of as our primary weapon. Pardner, when they're in the wire—or through the wire—all else *has* failed, and the close, personal Infantry fight is at hand.

Our forces in the Balkans realize—and train for—the danger; they live with it every day. They know that the region's indigenous forces are the children and grandchildren of the men and women—in regular army units and partisan organizations—who tied up 26 German divisions during World War II. Our leaders and their units in the former Yugoslavia are not likely to be caught off guard, but volatility is not limited to the Balkans.

Wherever our forces are deployed on stability and support operations around the world, the locals' loyalties to faith and family, home and neighbors go a lot deeper than any ties they have to us. Our commitment to global peace and stability means that we'll have troops on duty in potential hot spots for years to come, and we owe it to them to make sure they return safely when they have completed their mission. Training soldiers to maintain possession of their weapons is as important a force protection issue as we have ever addressed, and is one that needs to be hammered home in combat, combat support, and combat service support units alike. We should have learned by now that the secure rear area of the past—if it ever existed—is a fantasy, and that the enemy is where you find him. Stay alert, watch your lane, and keep your guard up.

RAE

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